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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between reading ability and attitude toward reading of 81 undergraduate education students enrolled in either elementary or secondary reading methods courses. Subjects' scores on the Mikulecky Behavioral Reading Attitude Measure indicated a positive attitude toward reading, but subjects' scores on the Nelson-Denny Reading Test reflected reading competence below 16th grade norms, with especially low scores on comprehension. Reading attitude showed significant, but not high, correlations with reading comprehension, vocabulary, and total reading, but did not correlate significantly with reading rate. (RL)

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THE READING READINESS OF FUTURE TEACHERS

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The Reading Readiness of Future Teachers

There has been an increased focus on the seriousness of the reading problems of school-age children today. However, while some researchers are studying the school age child, other researchers are trying to resolve or deal with the problems of adult readers and their skill deficiencies.

The educational system has been the target of criticism for not dealing directly with this problem. It is believed that the "teachers," the providers of knowledge to our children, are our only answer. This might prove to be a misconception.

Although there are no single, thorough, all-inclusive studies to provide us with observations about teachers' competence as readers and their attitudes towards reading there are some studies which have dealt with these variables both separately and together.

In looking at the studies on the reading abilities of teachers or "future" teachers, some distressing results are apparent.

Geeslin & York (1971) administered the Nelson-Denney Reading Test to groups of teachers in an in-service training program representing thirteen southeastern states. The mean score in comprehension for a group of teachers selected to teach the disadvantaged was at the 8.8 grade level, while for a group assigned to an in-service program reflected a mean score at the 9.6 grade level.

Dahlke's (1973) study of employed teachers in four in-service reading classes supports much of the findings of Geeslen and York. Dahlke administered

the Diagnostic Reading Survey Test to two in-service classes in Wisconsin and to two in-service classes in Florida in 1965 and 1966. The majority of the scores for total comprehension for both the Madison and Florida groups ranged in the 0-9th percentile using college freshmen norms. For the vocabulary score, though, the Wisconsin group's score ranged at the 30-39th percentile, while the Florida group's scores ranged at the 0-9th percentile.

Gentile and McMillan (1977) completed a four and one-half year study which measured the reading skills of 348 graduate students representing 35 different states whose major responsibilities were teaching reading. The results were somewhat disconcerting. The Cooperative English Reading Test was administered to all subjects and comparisons were based on their reading performance as compared with students entering their freshman year in college. About 28 percent of the teachers scored below the 50th percentile in vocabulary as compared with college freshmen; 49 percent scored below the 50th percentile in comprehension and 56 percent scored below the 50th percentile on reading speed.

More encouraging results were found by Cline (1969) at the University of Colorado among 205 pre-service teachers. The mean scores rated at the 59th percentile for total reading and the 70th percentile for rate.

Parallel findings to Cline's study were found by Milulecky and Ribovich (1977). One hundred forty-nine undergraduate and graduate reading students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison were administered the Nelson-Denney Reading Test with comparisons of 16th grade norms. The mean scores were rated at the 66th percentile in vocabulary, 60th percentile on comprehension, 63rd percentile for total reading and 72nd percentile for rate.

Mikulecky and Ribovich also administered three attitude measures in their study: The Estes Scale to Measure Attitudes Toward Reading, the Dulin-Chester Scale, and the Mikulecky Behavioral Reading Attitude Measure (MBRAM) for a basis of comparison between reading attitudes and reading competence. The MBRAM yielded higher correlations with the Nelson-Denney Reading Test than the other two attitude measures.

In Mueller's (1973) study of pre-service teachers in reading, 70 percent chose TV or movies over a book, more than 50 percent chose TV news over a newspaper, and 40 percent ranked reading fourth or lower on a list of seven leisure activities.

Erickson and Hatcher (1975) administered a Reading Attitude Measure designed by Kennedy and Halinski (1975) to 47 pre-service teachers with mean scores of about 173, which are similar to the attitudes of high school students found by Erickson and Hatcher.

Method

The aforementioned research does raise many questions about teachers as readers. However, no assumption can be made that a specific score on a standardized test is a predictor of success for teaching reading. Nor are we able to state what constitutes a low or high attitude toward reading for teachers. But, we can and should be aware of the teachers' weaknesses in reading and stimulate some form of action.

The questions were raised by this researcher:

1. Are future teachers competent in reading?
2. Do future teachers have positive attitudes toward reading?
3. What is the correlation, if any, between reading competence and reading attitude?

These are three of the five questions that Mikulecky and Ribovich tried to answer in their study at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Subjects

The subjects were 81 undergraduate students at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside who were taking various reading courses in the Spring of 1977 designed for elementary and secondary level. All the students were taking a reading course or state requirement for teaching certification.

Procedures

Reading performance of the subjects was measured by the Nelson-Denney Reading Test Form D (1973) and compared with the 16th grade norms (Brown, 1973). The subjects were also administered the Mikulecky Behavioral Reading Attitude Measure (MBRAM). This is a 20-item measure which reflects Krathwahl's Taxonomy of the Affective Domain, using behavioral descriptions of life-like out-of-school reading situations. For example:

10. Even though you are a very busy person, there is somehow always time for reading.

    VERY UNLIKE ME 1 2 3 4 5 VERY LIKE ME

    (Mikulecky, 1976)

Results

The scores of the pre-service teachers on the reading test and attitude measure in terms of means and standard deviations are recorded in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

The mean scores in Table 1 for the MBRAM reflect a positive attitude toward reading for the subjects tested. On the MBRAM, the mean rating of a

subject's attitude towards reading (on a scale of 1--very unlike me to 5--very like me) was 3.9 with a standard deviation of 0.8. About three fourths of the sample tested (75.4%) marked on the MBRAM a "4" or "5" for each attitude item. These results do indicate that this sample likes reading. However, on the Nelson-Denney Test, the mean scores fluctuate considerably between subtests. The scores indicate that the subjects in this stydy did poorly on the comprehension subtest and reflect similar discrepant scores of disabled readers.

By comparing the scores of the subjects with 16th grade norms of the Nelson-Denney Reading Test, a perspective on the average level of reading competence is found in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

The percentile levels found in Table 2 for this sample show a picture of low reading competence, especially in comprehension, as is found throughout most of the literature.

Relationships between the variables, reading competence and reading attitude were determined by using the Pearson product-moment correlation procedure from the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Table 3 provides all the correlation coefficients along with their level of significance.

Insert Table 3 about here

In looking at Table 3, all the correlations between attitude toward reading and reading vocabulary, comprehension and total reading were significant. However, the correlations were not high.

For this sample, however, attitude did not correlate significantly with reading rate.

Discussion

Although we would like to make an assumption that the scores on a standardized reading test is a predictor of success for teaching reading, it cannot be said. There are countless variables, such as sex, teacher's personality, educational background, interests, personality and others which play an important part in the teaching process and they cannot be ignored.

One can only look at the findings of this study and realize that there appears to be some future teachers whose reading skills are deficient even though they have positive attitudes towards reading.

Our concern here is to remedy the problem through further research relating to alternative approaches to better prepare future teachers.

Many questions arise from such a study and they can only be resolved by further investigations. The teachers who have favorable attitudes toward reading, will they manifest enthusiasm for reading in the classroom? What teaching strategies will they employ to facilitate reading performance and favorable attitudes toward reading? The most important question, does this all make a difference for the student in the classroom?

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Table 1

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations on the
Nelson-Denney Reading Test and the MBRAM
for the Preservice Teachers

Test	Maximum Score	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Mikulecky Behavioral Reading Attitude Measure			
Total Face Value Scoring	100	77.2	13.3
Nelson-Denney Reading Test			
Vocabulary	100	51.8	19.7
Comprehension	72	22.5	6.1
Total	172	74.3	24.7
Rate	615	373.9	144.1

N=81

Table 2

Mean Scores and Percentile Ranks of Subjects

on the Nelson-Denney Reading Tests*

	N	Mean Score	Percentile Rank
Vocabulary	81	51.8	56%
Comprehension	81	22.5	2%
Total	81	74.3	16%
Rate	81	373.9	78%

*16th grade norms

Table 3

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation for Reading Competence and Attitude of Reading

	MBRAM	Nelson-Denney			
		Vocabulary	Comprehension	Total	Rate
MBRAM		.35*	.28*	.35*	.07
Nelson-Denney					
Vocabulary			.75*	.99*	.30*
Comprehension				.85*	.16
Total					.28*

*$p < .01$